



Office of Environmental Health E-Newsletter

Electronic version available at: www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/rs/ehnl.htm

November 2005

Mexican-Style Soft Cheese Advisory

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently issued a health advisory for certain types of soft cheese made from raw (unpasteurized) milk. The advisory warned that certain types of raw milk soft cheese could cause serious infections including, listeriosis, brucellosis, salmonellosis, and tuberculosis, particularly in high-risk groups including, pregnant women, newborns, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems. Bacteria in the soil and water can contaminate foods of animal origin. Without adequate pasteurization, the bacteria can survive and multiply in the contaminated foods. Listeriosis is the emerging infection of concern with raw milk soft cheese. An estimated 2,500 persons become ill with listeriosis each year in the United States and of these, 500 die. Symptoms include fever, muscle ache, and sometimes nausea or diarrhea. If the infection spreads, headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions may occur. The incubation period ranges from 3 - 70 days.

Raw milk soft cheese from Mexico and Central American countries present the most concern. These cheeses are typically made from raw milk in non-commercial settings with questionable sanitary conditions and are transported to the United States in personal luggage and belongings. Non-commercial quantities of this cheese can be transported across the border without any restrictions. The FDA is currently looking at tighter restrictions on non-commercial entries. In addition, personal domestic production of this cheese in the United States is on the rise. Common Mexican-style raw milk soft cheese including queso blanco, queso fresco, and Panela are very popular among the Hispanic community.



Arizona County Health Department inspectors have observed these cheeses being sold at flea markets, door-to-door, in shopping center parking lots, and out of personal vehicles. Although personal production and consumption is legal, commercial activity is illegal and prohibited.

The Arizona Department of Health Services recommends that consumers do not eat any type of raw milk soft cheese. Pregnant women are about 20 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis. Infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or stillbirth, premature delivery or infection of the newborn.

In addition to avoiding consumption of raw milk and products made from raw milk, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have provided these general recommendations to reduce the risk for listeriosis:

Thoroughly cook raw food from animal sources,

Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from vegetables and ready-to-eat foods,

Wash hands and food contact surfaces after handling raw foods,

Properly refrigerate perishable foods.

Additional CDC recommendations for persons at high risk:

Do not eat hot dogs, deli meats, or luncheon meats unless they are reheated until steaming hot.

Avoid getting fluid from hot dog packages on other foods, utensils, and food contact surfaces, and wash hands after handling hot dogs, deli meats, and luncheon meats.

Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue veined cheeses or Mexican-style cheeses unless they have labels that clearly state they are made from pasteurized milk.

Do not eat refrigerated pates or meat spreads. Canned and shelf-stable pates and meat spreads may be eaten.

Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood unless it is an ingredient in a cooked dish, such as a casserole. Canned and shelf-stable smoked seafoods may be eaten.

(This article will also appear in the November/December 2005 ADHS Prevention Bulletin.)

5th Annual On-Site Wastewater Conference

The Arizona County Directors of Environmental Health and Arizona Environmental Health Associations are presenting the 5th Annual On-Site Wastewater Conference on February 1 - 2, 2006 in Laughlin, Nevada. Registration information and the agenda are available on line at www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/rs/traininq.htm.

The Arizona Sanitarian's Council has awarded 12.5 contact hours for this conference.

Registration Renewal - Final Reminder

The 2006 Registered Sanitarian Renewal Applications were sent via U.S. Mail to all Arizona Registered Sanitarians. If you have not received your packet, you can download a copy of the renewal application at www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/rs/pdf/san_renew.pdf or you can call (602) 364-3118 to have it mailed to you.

As a final reminder, renewal now requires that you obtain 12 contact hours of continuing education by December 31, 2005 for the 2006 renewal. If you do not obtain the 12 contact hours, your registration will lapse and you will be required to go through the entire application process and pass the examination to restore your registration. Please don't let this happen.

Please contact Don Herrington at (602) 364-3142 or herrind@azdhs.gov, if you have any questions.

School Rule Update

The oral proceeding for the proposed rulemaking package for the Public School Sanitation rule was held at ADHS on August 26, 2005.

ADHS has prepared a response to the comments received about the proposed rules, and expects to submit the rulemaking to the Governor's Regulatory Review Council later this month.

Milk Rule Delayed

The milk rule was filed with the Governor's Regulatory Review Council (GRRRC). However, it was withdrawn to confirm that the rule change would not conflict with the Arizona Department of Agriculture's raw milk provisions in their rules. It is anticipated that the rule will be re-filed with GRRRC in early January 2006.

FY 2005 Food Safety and Environmental Services Report

The ADHS FY 2005 Food Safety and Environmental Services Activity Report will be posted in mid-November on-line at www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/oehreports.htm.

Newsletter comments or questions can be directed to Bob Gomez, Program Manager, ADHS, at (602) 364-3140 or gomezr@azdhs.gov.

